

# Grey Britain has more pensioners than children

Richard Ford, Home Correspondent  
From The Times August 22, 2008

Pensioners outnumber children for the first time as more and more people live longer, new figures show.

The fastest-growing pensioner group is the over-80s, who are benefiting from improved diets and healthcare. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that the future is grey, with the pensioner population projected to grow to more than 12 million within two years.

The long-term implications of the pensioner population rising to 11,561,000 and the number of under-16s falling to 11,509,000 last year will affect housing, health and education in the years to come.

Within the overall figures, the number of over-80s has doubled to 2.7million in the past 27 years.

## [Times Archive, 1965: 200,000 extra births from immigration](#)

The rise in immigration could account for between 25 and 30 per cent of the total number of additional births

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As soon as the preliminary figures emerged, officials from the ONS were called in by ministers to discuss the policy implications.

Mervyn Kohler, special adviser at Help the Aged, said that the figures indicated an urgent need to develop the potential of older people or else Britain would end up supporting a costly dependency culture among the elderly. More companies should invest in training older people to allow them to work, part-time or full-time, beyond the usual retirement age, he said.

Charities for older people said that the greater consequences of an ageing population would be in housing and in the community, where change would be needed to allow them to continue living independent lives.

Mr Kohler called for practical measures, including designing houses with fewer steps, doors wide enough to take wheelchairs and electricity sockets installed at waist level.

In communities he said that there would have to be more public transport to make it easier for the elderly to shop, plus the siting of seats and benches to allow them to rest while walking and more public lavatories for those who suffered from incontinence.

He said: "All the trends we have seen recently is that these kinds of facilities are going into decline. We are closing post offices, public toilets and public houses. We cannot afford to let it continue when we see this kind of demographic change taking place."

Even if many of these facilities are put in place, Mr Kohler said that Britain faced a "huge time bomb" of age-related dementia. "There will have to be a massive investment in research into dementia. If we don't crack that, we are going to find ourselves with a huge number of people suffering from dementia, and the costs will be enormous."

The rise in the number of pensioners and the fall in the number of children means there will be fewer taxpayers to support the ageing population - the demographic time bomb.

One argument for increasing levels of immigration is that this could help to mitigate the impact of a higher proportion of pensioners.

Yesterday's figures from the ONS shows the rate of immigration reaching a record level last year, with more than 600,000 people arriving - more than double the number when Labour came to power.

Britain's population rose to just under 61 million in mid-2007, a rise of almost 2 million since 2001. Record immigration was matched by a record 406,000 people leaving the country, including 202,000 British citizens. This gave a net influx of 198,000 last year, a net gain of 1 million since 2001.

Guy Goodwin, of the ONS, said: "There is a huge churn of one million people either coming in or going out of the country with the intention of staying for a year."

Although net migration accounts for more than half of all population growth, officials said that the main cause of growth in the next two years will be a rise in the birth rate after an influx of female migrants.

Twenty-three per cent of births last year were to mothers born outside the UK but in some parts of the country the figure is much higher. Newham, in East London, tops the list, with 75 per cent of births being to foreign women, and Brent with 72 per cent.

Mr Goodwin, director of population at ONS, said: “The basic message in terms of population growth is that yesterday's migrants as well as today's migrants are contributing to the population growth that we are seeing.”

Dominic Grieve, the Shadow Home Secretary, said: “These figures provide a stark illustration of Labour's failure to manage our immigration system.” He added: “Labour must realise that immigration can benefit the country, but only if it is properly controlled.”

## **Ageing population brings grave problems**

Gary Duncan: Economic View

There were two summits taking place in Europe at the end of last week.

In Brussels, European Union leaders occupied themselves with yet another bout of their interminable haggling over political architecture. Yet, as the national leaders battled over how Europe should be governed, an ultimately more crucial discussion of issues that will shape the fate of the continent was taking place several hundred miles away.

Had any of the national leaders been present at the sixth Munich Economic Summit, they would have had little doubt that the discussion there – of the swift and certain ageing of Europe's population – was of more fundamental importance than their Brussels scrap.

The demographic tides rising across the developed world, and which will before long engulf the entire European continent, are now fairly well recognised.

Most of us understand that Europe is turning grey; that more and more of us will soon join legions of the elderly, even as the numbers of those of working age left to support the old dwindle.

But if this problem has become pretty well-known, the startling size of it is sometimes forgotten. So, too, is its urgency.

The Munich summit, organised by the CESifo Group, the leading think-tank based at the Bavarian capital's university, and by the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt, offered a compelling reminder of the extent of the demographic shift, and of its pervasive repercussions.

The basic numbers leave little doubt over how high the stakes really are. By 2050, ever-lengthening lifespans and slumping birthrates mean that Europe's population of working age will drop by 38 million. At the same time, numbers aged 65 and over will rise by 40 million. That will swell the EU's pensioner population to more than 100 million. The number of workers for every individual of 65-plus will fall from more than three to fewer than two.

It is hard not to react with the same sort of gloom that grips us individually when we contemplate eventual decrepitude. **Is Europe, too, doomed to senescence?**

A more hopeful scenario that energised the academic, political and business leaders in Munich was set out by Klaus Kleinfeld, outgoing chief executive of Siemens. His vision was one in which the challenges of an ageing continent were turned into opportunities; in which innovations in healthcare and social reform allowed Europe to age with grace and happiness, while remaining dynamic.

But can such an optimistic future conceivably be possible? A key cause for optimism is medical progress. Fortunately, we are in the midst of an era of rapid and accelerating advancement and innovation in pharmacology and biotechnology. New pharmaceutical compounds and gene-based therapies hold out the promise of mitigating, if not ending, the worst aspects of ageing. Older people are already healthier than ever before; they will almost certainly become much more so.

A healthier elderly population is also one that can be active for longer and make a continuing contribution to economic growth. Thus, the second element of making an ageing Europe work is just that – extending working lives.

For politicians, it will be hard to sell later retirement to a generation that has watched parents put their feet up for good at 50. But, together with significantly more saving before retirement, this is inescapable. To make this possible, so, too, are fundamental changes to the jobs market, workplace culture, and attitudes to older people.

As the burgeoning ranks of the old in turn sends the cost of state pensions ballooning, cuts in the generosity of these, as well as of other benefits, will also be unavoidable. Thus, the sooner politicians steel themselves to communicate this hard truth, the faster and better electorates will come to understand the changes that lie before us.

**There are two further, and critical, political challenges that leaders must confront. The first concerns immigration, the second productivity.**

**Since Europe is about to run out of able workers, but will have its ever-older army of the old to support, a clear implication is that politicians must confront hostility to immigration, which must be part of the solution. It can, however, be only a part since the numbers of migrants required to stabilise the labour force is too large to be feasible, either politically or practically. EU figures suggest that a net 1.6 million immigrants a year would be needed Europe-wide. In Britain, this would mean a more than doubling of the population by mid-century.**

**This leads us to the issue of productivity and economic reform.**

Since national growth potential is determined by two principal factors, the working population and its productivity, or output per person, a declining pool of labour threatens to undercut growth and living standards. That threat will be exacerbated, too, by the effect of increased saving of existing workers on consumption and investment.

Enhancing productivity to offset a shrinking workforce is, therefore, vital. But it is no secret that the EU's so-called Lisbon agenda, launched with a fanfare in Portugal at the turn of the decade, and supposed to make Europe the world's most dynamic economy, has run into the sand as leaders have shrunk from essential structural reform. This lack of will was evident again last week as the Brussels summit scrapped a treaty commitment to "free and undistorted competition". Yet this cannot continue. Radical and determined reform is now urgently required, and failure will come at the highest of costs. **An ageing Europe is one with no time to waste.**

There is, it should now be obvious, no simple or easy solution to Europe's looming demographic transition.

However, with fortune and fortitude, it also seems clear that a Europe with one foot in the grave is not – after all – quite dead yet.

And, as Maurice Chevalier observed: "Old age is not so bad when you consider the alternative."

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Things would be much easier if governments, particularly ours stopped wasting huge amounts of public taxes on foreign adventures as well as numerous domestic 'initiatives' which are usually only an excuse for politicians to strut around the political stage. Numerous failed I.T.systems and a huge public workforce are usually the only end result and it is one of the reasons British people are so heavily taxed and engulfed with layers and layers of regulations. Buy to let investments have been popular because of failures to regulate pensions, hence soaring house prices. Those who make no provision for retirement are not penalised at all, but handed benefits without question. Pension saving must be made compulsory and families must be financially encouraged to produce children. Ministers must be made accountable for waste and failure and we should no longer go on crusades abroad which have the only effect of allowing our politicians to strut a larger stage. THERE - IT'S EASY ISNT IT

Newton, Liverpool, England

How can the upcoming generation be expected to fund the retirement of the selfish baby boomers? They're already priced out of home ownership thanks to boomer greed., and contributing to their very own pension is becoming an increasingly expensive luxury. Children too are a luxury to most middle income couples - house prices have once again put paid to the dream of affording offspring. The boomers will one day reap what they sow when there is no one around to rent their BTL and fund their retirement.

PT, Tynemouth, UK

A demographic inversion will only be avoided if the population keeps growing. This is not sustainable. Just let it happen. In 30 or 40 years the worst of it will be over and the population can stabilise at a lower level - much better for everyone.

malcolm, london,

# How to avoid sex before marriage

07:30 - 21-August-2008

10 readers have commented on this story.

[Click here to read their views.](#)

How to avoid sex is one of the topics on the agenda at this weekend's Lincolnshire Grapevine Christian festival.

Speakers at the festival will be giving advice to teenage worshippers on how to avoid sexual encounters.

Chastity until marriage is still practised and preached as part of the Christian faith. However, many young followers struggle to uphold the doctrine in the face of peer pressure.

Carl Belcher (35) works for Ground Level, a Christian network providing support for local churches and ministries.

He will be offering his advice at the five-day festival, which starts on Friday at the Lincolnshire Showground, north of Lincoln.

"Waiting until marriage avoids one suffering the heartache of broken down sexual relationships, not to mention the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies," he said.

"The most helpful advice I can give is to think well in advance of a tempting situation arising. It would be unrealistic to expect one to make moral choices in the midst of a heated moment.

"Before my partner and I got married we tried not to spend time exclusively together or put ourselves in situations where it would be easy to have sex.

Daniel Gill (22) is a member of the congregation at Monks Road Methodist Church in Lincoln. He said: "My fiancée and I have been together for two years and we are both devout Christians.

"It takes a strong person to stay no in the face of sexual triggers but we've had a frank discussion and decided that we'll save all aspects of sex until marriage."

**For more on this story, see Thursday's Echo**

10 comments. Last at: 21-Aug-2008 16:21

- how to avoid divorce (in some cases) - have sex before marriage!

*martin kinsley, Lincoln South*

commented on 21-Aug-2008 16:21

- Hold on a cotton picking minute! Is not true that christ's mother and father were unmarried? I have all due respect for peoples personal belief however, it is possible to have a committed monogomous life long relationship without the need for christian marriage! I was brought up in the christian church. But for a long time I have been an athiest and proud of it too!

*Stephen Minister, Lincoln*

commented on 21-Aug-2008 15:38